

ABSTRACT

A method of operating a network is beneficially conducted on a municipality or neighborhood level. The method in disclosed embodiments comprises installing a digital communications network within a limited selected geographical region. The network is formed from a high speed backbone and a plurality of nodes branching outward from the high speed backbone. A plurality of communicating stations are connected to the network and users at each communicating station subscribe to communicate over the network. Due to the unique scope of the network, the users are related primarily by virtue of their residence in a common geographical region. The network may be installed within a public utility right of way and may be used to monitor utility usage and to bill utility users. The network is thus independent of public telephone infrastructure. The network is preferably partitioned and communications are direct from station to station without broadcasting. Outside access, such as to the Internet is provided through gateways within the backbone.

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